Jōkei and Kannon: Defending Buddhist Pluralism in Medieval Japan

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Introduction

Religious and doctrinal debates take place on many levels. As students of religion, we are most often drawn to the abstract arguments offered in written tracts with their logical structure, intelligible assertions, and pointed critiques of opposing positions. Much recent scholarship has revealed, however, that ideological deliberations take place just as often at the level of praxis and in modes of symbolic discourse quite distinct from the written treatises to which we are logically drawn. Admittedly, interpreting ambiguous and selectively reported actions is invariably more speculative than relying on explicit arguments found in published tracts. How reliable are the sources and how does one make sense of the possible tensions between praxis and unequivocal pronouncements? What are we to make of the appropriation of religious symbols, invariably multivalent in meaning, in the context of various social, political, and cultural disputes? Despite the hazards, in this essay I wish to examine the ritual texts and proselytizing efforts of Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213), a prominent monk in the Hossō 法相 school of the early medieval era in Japan. I will seek to interpret his personal devotion and evangelism in the context of broader ideological clashes taking place. More specifically, this study will ask how we should make sense of Jōkei's gradually evolving devotional allegiance to Kannon 観音 in the last ten or so years of his life. I will contend that Kannon served as the perfect symbolic foil for Jōkei to counter the popular *senju nenbutsu* 専修念仏 (exclusive practice of the nenbutsu) teachings expounded by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and the threat it represented to established Buddhism in Japan.

The late Heian, early Kamakura period is well known for the rising popularity of Amida devotion. With the inspiring tales of birth in Amida's realm, Sukhāvatī (Jpn. Gokuraku 極楽), found in the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (Collection on the Essentials for Birth in the Pure Land) by Genshin 源信 (942–1017) and the proselytizing of monks such as Ryōgen 良源 (912–985), Ryōnin 良忍 (1072–1132), and of course Hōnen, devotion to Amida and aspiration for birth in his realm increasingly overshadowed the popularity of other Buddhist deities and soteriological goals. Elsewhere, I have noted the intensely competitive campaigns between sacred sites and devotional factions in the context of the gradual decline in state support for Buddhism and the shifting sources of patronage due in no small measure to the broader social, economic, and political transformations taking place.[1] The various forms of devotional literature espousing the relative merits of paying due homage to one divinity or another are analogous to the advertising campaigns of competing consumer product corporations. While the inspiration behind such devotional rhetoric was often linked to competition among sacred devotional sites for needed patronage, sectarian disputes, or mundane power struggles, I would like to examine here strategic shifts in devotional proselytizing and their relation to underlying doctrinal debates taking place during the medieval period.

In order to understand Jōkei's efforts and intentions, it will first be necessary to briefly review the history of Kannon devotion in Japan, followed by a brief introduction to Jōkei and his somewhat distinctive devotional background. Having laid this groundwork, I will then address the question of the shift of his devotional allegiance toward Kannon in the latter years of his life.

Kannon in Early Japanese History

As most readers are no doubt aware, Kannon, known as Avalokiteśvara in India and Kuan-yin in China, is the bodhisattva of compassion who according to tradition dwells atop Mt. Potalaka (Jpn. Fudaraku 補陀洛) in the seas south of India from whence he (or she) responds to the suffering cries of all sentient beings.[2] Made famous throughout East Asia by the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*), which praises the bodhisattva's compassion and miraculous powers, Kannon has always been one of the most

[1] See Ford 2006, pp. 153–55.

[2] While acknowledging bi-gender representations of Kannon, particularly in Chinese iconography, I will refer, for convenience only, to the bodhisattva using a masculine pronoun.

popular Buddhist divinities in Japan. He is also prominent as one of the two attendant bodhisattvas to Amida. Indeed, one apocryphal Chinese sutra claims that Kannon will be Amida's successor in the Pure Land.[3]

Devotion to Kannon in Japan dates to the early years of Buddhism's transmission and, much like devotion to Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku 弥勒), exhibits two dimensions that one might simplistically label "this-worldly" and "other-worldly." The former refers to Kannon devotional practices that seek the various benefits one can enjoy in this lifetime such as safe childbirth, protection from evil demons, fire, shipwrecks, and so forth. Such devotion can be categorized as an attempt to gain *genze riyaku* 現世利益, or "this-worldly benefits" realized through religious practice and devotion. The *Lotus Sutra* enumerates a long list of these immediate benefits. Another form of devotion centers more on the aspiration for birth in Kannon's realm atop Mt. Potalaka after death. Potalaka is described in the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* (Jpn. *Kegonkyō* 華厳経) and elsewhere in terms much like those of a Buddha's realm except that Kannon's realm is situated within our Sahā-world.[4] Thus, the requirements for birth there are substantially less onerous (at least according to the standard bodhisattva path and criteria for birth in such realms) than those for achieving birth in Amida's realm, for example.[5]

Kannon is distinctive within the world of Buddhist divinities for his multiple manifest forms. As the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* proclaims, Kannon will assume any of an infinite number of guises, including a Buddha, god, householder, official, Brahman, dragon, spirit, and boy or girl, according to the needs and dispositions of the devotee. In Japan, Kannon came to be conventionally represented in six (or, less frequently, seven) well-known

[3] The *Kuan-shih-yin p'u-sa shou-chi ching* 観世音菩薩授記経 (Sutra on the Prediction [of Enlightenment] to Kannon, T 12: 357a) states that upon Amida's passing into Nirvana, Kannon will succeed him and be called P'u-kuang Kung-te-shan Ju-lai 普光功徳山王如來 (the universally illuminating Tathāgata king of merit mountain). In addition, the *Pei-hua ching* 悲華経 (Skt. *Karunāpuṇḍarīka sūtra*), translated between 397 and 439, describes Kannon (then named 不眴 Pu-hsün) as the oldest of Amida's thousand sons, when the latter was a ruling king. The text states that when Amida enters Nirvana, Kannon will succeed him with the same title as above (T 3: 185c–86c). For a detailed analysis of the ambiguity of Kannon's status, see Yu 1997, p. 411. Doctrinally speaking, this prediction is a problem, given Amida's famous bodhisattva vow not to enter Nirvana until all beings have before him.

[4] This phrase refers to our present world full of suffering that must be endured. "Sahā" means "endurance."

[5] See Ford 2006, pp. 101–13 for a detailed description of the traditional bodhisattva stages and their relevance to birth in the various realms of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

iconographic forms (Roku Kannon 六観音) that were influenced largely by the Tendai 天台 and Shingon 真言 esoteric traditions. These include Shō Kannon 聖観音 (holy), Senju Kannon 千手観音 (thousand-armed), Batō Kannon 馬頭観音 (horse-headed), Jūichimen Kannon 十一面観音 (eleven-faced), Juntei Kannon 准胝観音 (a transliteration of the Sanskrit, Cundī),[6] and Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音 (with jewel and wheel). These manifest forms came to be associated, respectively, with the six realms of rebirth as reflected in the table below.[7]

Incarnation	**Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道)**
Shō Kannon	Hell (*jigoku* 地獄)
Senju Kannon	Hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼)
Batō Kannon	Animal (*chikushō* 畜生)
Jūichimen Kannon	Asura (*shura* 修羅)
Juntei Kannon	Human (*ningen* 人間)
Nyoirin Kannon	God (*ten* 天)

Figure 1. The relationship between the six Kannon and the six realms.

There is also a group of thirty-three different incarnations of Kannon listed in the *Kannonkyō* 観音経, which obviously conveys the message that Kannon can manifest in numerous and appropriate guises as needed to alleviate the suffering of beings. The many pilgrimage circuits honoring Kannon typically have thirty-three temple stops, each with an auspicious central image (*honzon* 本尊) of one of the six or seven prominent forms described above. The Saigoku circuit (Saigoku Sanjūsan Kannon Reijō 西国三十三観音霊場), the first and most popular of these, is traditionally dated to the ninth century but most likely began in the early twelfth century.[8] It did not become a popular pilgrimage for commoners until the sixteenth century, but since that time over 250 other circuits have developed throughout Japan. This is merely one indication of the

[6] The Tendai tradition gives Fukū Kenjaku Kannon 不空羂索観音 (Skt. Amoghapāśa) as the fifth Kannon.

[7] In addition to the description of the six Kannon based on iconographic form described above, there is also a classification which is based on the bodhisattva's qualities. There, the six Kannon are described as the Kannon of great compassion, of great mercy, of lion courage, of universal light, of leaders amongst gods and men, and the great omniscient Brahmā. See *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, s. v. "liu tao" 六道 . See also Hayami 1982, p. 167ff.

[8] See Foard 1982, pp. 231–51. See also MacWilliams 1997, pp. 375–411 (esp. pp. 375–76).

devotional popularity of Kannon throughout Japanese history. Some of the pilgrimage pamphlets or guides list the various benefits one might accrue by completing the pilgrimage or even by sponsoring a holy man to complete the circuit on one's behalf. A Tokugawa version includes (1) the benefit of being born on Mt. Potalaka, (2) a guarantee of birth in Amida's Pure Land, and (3) the fulfillment of all of one's wishes.[9] Thus, the pilgrimage rhetoric, at least by the sixteenth century, embraced both of the dimensions—"this-worldly" and "other-worldly." It is fair to say, however, that during most periods of Japan's history, the majority of devotees sought this-worldly benefits in their devotion to Kannon. Soteriologically, Amida's Land of Bliss was by far the most aspired destination for birth in one's next life.

At this point, I want to highlight the theme of multiplicity that characterizes Kannon devotion and representations. By this I mean the plurality of forms through which Kannon is manifest and the plurality of sacred places where one might establish a karmic connection (*kechien* 結縁) and thereby access the auspicious power of Kannon. This multiplicity, we should note, is fundamentally related to the bodhisattva's primary virtue of compassion. It is precisely because Kannon has perfected compassion, one of the two principal virtues of a bodhisattva (the other being wisdom), that he incarnates in so many forms so to respond to suffering beings of varying karmic, social, and soteriological dispositions. It is this fundamentally pluralistic feature of Kannon, I will argue, that appealed to Jōkei in the context of his opposition to the exclusivisitic message of *senju nenbutsu* practitioners.

Jōkei—A Brief Biography[10]

We now turn to Jōkei and his gravitation toward Kannon in his evangelical efforts. Jōkei was born into the powerful Fujiwara clan. His grandfather was Fujiwara Michinori 藤原通憲 (1106–1159), known best perhaps by his clerical name of Shinzei 信西, who was a prominent adviser to Emperor Goshirakawa 後白川. As described in gruesome detail in the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, Shinzei was beheaded by the allies of Fujiwara Nobuyori 藤原信頼 (1133–1160), who led a competing faction of the Fujiwara during the dangerous times leading up to the formation of the Kamakura shogunate.[11] Like so many of his uncles and brothers, Jōkei subsequently entered the monastic world through

[9] Foard 1982, p. 236.

[10] For a more complete biography of Jōkei, see Ford 2006, pp. 18–28.

[11] For a detailed account, see Yoshikawa 1956, pp. 297–310.

Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara. By twenty-seven, he had appeared at the most prestigious yearly court debates such as the Yuimae 維摩会 at Kōfukuji and several other national lectures. Based on his record and pedigree, there is every indication that he would have risen to the top of Kōfukuji's hierarchy just as his uncle and teacher Kakuken 覚憲 (1131–1212) had done.

Oddly enough, however, in 1193 at the age of thiry-eight, Jōkei's life took an unexpected turn. Despite the promising institutional career before him and for reasons not entirely clear, Jōkei left Kōfukuji to take up residence in a small but well-known temple hermitage, Kasagidera 笠置寺, in the mountains about twelve kilometers northeast of Nara. By doing so, he relinquished his official status (*kansō* 官僧) to pursue the path of a reclusive monk (*tonseisō* 遁世僧). In some ways reminiscent of the founder of Buddhism, Śākyamuni, Jōkei abandoned a life of urban luxury, power and prestige for a life of relative reclusion and spiritual contemplation, ideally at least. In reality, Jōkei continued to interact over the years with many powerful figures including the Emperor and leading members of the Court.

Jōkei's chosen refuge, Kasagidera, was far from obscure. A frequently visited pilgrimage site, it was famous for an enormous cliff-carved image of Maitreya, the future Buddha. Consequently, Mt. Kasagi was said to contain an entranceway to Maitreya's heavenly realm, Tuṣita (Jpn. Tosotsu 兜率). Mt. Kasagi also held interesting connections to Kannon. One legend has it that En no Ozunu 役小角 (ca. 634–ca. 706), the mythical founder of Shugendō 修験道 (mountain asceticism), climbed Mt. Kasagi in 683 to worship Kannon.[12] Also of note, in 1202 Jōkei moved to Kannon'in 観音院, a subtemple on the east side of the mountain, and resided there until he moved to Kaijūsenji 海住山寺 in 1208. The move to Kaijūsenji, an obscure temple about seven kilometers northwest of Mt. Kasagi, also remains unexplained. The primary image, Jūichimen Kannon, has led some scholars to conjecture that this marks the more significant turning point in Jōkei's devotion to Kannon.[13] At any rate, Jōkei passed

[12] En no Ozunu (also known as En no Gyōja 役行者) was reportedly exiled by the Court in 699 to eastern Japan, where he became closely linked to the sacred legends of Mt. Fuji. See Collcutt 1988, p. 253.

[13] This temple was originally known as Fudaraku-san Kannonji. Jōkei renamed it Kaijūsenji, or "mountain in the sea temple." The pagoda that still stands there today was built in 1214 by Jōkei's disciple Kakushin 覚真 (1170–1243; formerly Fujiwara Nagafusa 藤原長房) to honor the first anniversary of Jōkei's death. It is the second oldest pagoda in Kyoto prefecture, a national treasure, and houses a Buddha relic that Jōkei received from Emperor Gotoba 後鳥羽 (1180–1239).

away of unknown causes five years later in 1213 at the age of fifty-eight.

Jōkei is perhaps best known as the author of the *Kōfukuji sōjō* 興福寺奏状 (Kōfukuji Petition, 1205),[14] an appeal to the Court on behalf of the eight established Buddhist schools to censure Hōnen's teachings and followers. I will return to this momentarily. He is also recognized for his efforts to reform Hossō doctrine and revive formal study of and adherence to the traditional monastic precepts (Ch. *Ssu-fen lü* 四分律, Jpn. *Shibun ritsu*, or Vinaya in Four Parts). Finally, Jōkei is often noted for his eclectic devotional corpus. More specifically, he authored at least thirty *kōshiki* 講式 (Buddhist ceremonials), ritual liturgies that praise and promote devotion to a wide variety of Buddhist and Shinto divinities including Śākyamuni, Kannon, Maitreya, Bhaiṣajyaguru (Jpn. Yakushi 薬師), Kṣitigharbha (Jpn. Jizō 地蔵), Sarasvatī (Jpn. Benten 弁天), Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子, and the Kasuga 春日 deity. In addition to various pragmatic functions such as fund-raising, these texts served as the liturgies for rituals, usually open to devotees of all walks of life, that promoted the merit and power of these divinities and praised the efficacy of paying due homage to them. Of the more than 300 extant *kōshiki* (of which ninety percent of those datable were written between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and two-thirds during the Kamakura era), Jōkei is credited with twice as many as the next most attributed author (Myōe 明恵). Making sense of this devotional eclecticism, though not exceptional for the time but certainly a contrast to the exclusivistic tendencies of the great founders of "Kamakura Buddhism," has been a curiosity and a challenge for scholars studying Jōkei.[15]

Jōkeiš Defense of Buddhist Pluralism

My primary intent in this essay is to explore Jōkei's discernible gravitation toward promoting Kannon during the latter years of his life, in the context of his grave misgivings over the growing popularity of Hōnen's teachings. Let us briefly turn to Jōkei's dispute with Hōnen and the general expansion of Pure Land worship during the late Heian and early Kamakura period. Most readers will be familiar with the gist of Hōnen's message, particularly the way it is presented in his *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選択本願念仏集 (Collection on the Nenbutsu of the Principle Vow Singled Out [by Amida], hereafter referred

[14] Kamata and Tanaka 1971, pp. 312–16.

[15] For a more complete analysis of Jōkei's devotional eclecticism, see Ford 2006, pp. 69–156.

to as the *Senchakushū*). This well-known treatise, written according to tradition in 1198 at the behest of former Chancellor (*kanpaku* 関白) Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 (1149–1207), represents Hōnen's effort to make a case for an independent Pure Land school.[16] It was not officially published, however, until after Hōnen's death in 1212. Nevertheless, its contents must have been known to some extent perhaps simply through Hōnen's public lectures and hearsay, since Jōkei's petition, written in 1205, and a Tendai petition, written in 1204, betray considerable knowledge of Hōnen's argument and justifications for an independent Pure Land school.

In brief, Hōnen sets forth three basic objectives in his treatise. The first was his overriding effort to make the case for an independent Pure Land school by means of the well-established criteria of his day—doctrinal classification, a textual canon, and a patriarchal lineage. In all three cases, he depended heavily on Shan-tao 善導 (Jpn. Zendō, 613–681) the seventh-century Pure Land patriarch of China. Second, Hōnen endeavored to supplant, for all practical purposes in this lifetime at least, the traditional goal of enlightenment with birth in Amida's Pure Land. And third, he rejected the salvific efficacy of all practices and objects of devotion with the singular exceptions of the oral recitation of the nenbutsu and Amida Buddha, respectively. Thus, Hōnen was exclusivistic in terms of both the goal and means of Buddhist practice.

Jōkei's critique of Hōnen's message can be read as a defense of what I have labeled the "pluralistic" Buddhist tradition. By pluralism here I am not referring, in the modern sense of this term, to the Buddhist response to other religious truth claims, but rather to the recognition, indeed affirmation, of an indispensable plurality of efficacious teachings and practices within the Buddhist tradition itself. Several themes that buttress Jōkei's "pluralistic" outlook appear throughout his eclectic corpus, including his specific critique of Hōnen. The first, and perhaps foremost, is Jōkei's fundamentally hierarchical view of humanity. Presupposing the Buddhist view that we have all had (and will continue to have) an infinite number of incarnations through various sentient forms, Jōkei considered each of us to be at different points along the bodhisattva path. Underlying this perspective is a second theme emphasizing the karmic law of cause and effect that governs one's path from life to life including one's appearance, social class, intellect, character, moral inclinations, spiritual dispositions, and so forth. For example, in the *Kan'yū dōhō ki* 勧誘同法記

[16] Christoph Kleine argues contrarily that Hōnen had no intention of establishing an independent sect. See Kleine 1985, p. 87.

(Encouraging Mutual Understanding of the Dharma, date unknown),[17] Jōkei writes:

> The spiritual capacity of bodhisattvas is assorted and different. Some are inclined toward sudden realization while others toward gradual realization; some excel in wisdom, while others excel in compassion; some are intimidated by defilements (*bonnō* 煩悩; Skt. *kleśa*), while others are not; and so forth.[18]

These manifest differences in spiritual capacity necessitate, from Jōkei's perspective, what I am labeling Buddhist pluralism. Put simply, different needs call for different means. For example, in the *Kōfukuji sōjō*, Jōkei writes:

> Numerous gates to the Dharma await and open according to one's capacity (*ki* 機), and we receive the sweet medicine [of the Dharma] according to our karmic predisposition. They are all part of the True Dharma realized by the great teacher Śākyamuni through difficult and arduous practice over innumerable kalpas. Now to be attached to [calling] the name of one Buddha is to utterly obstruct the path to liberation.[19]

Thus, Jōkei's view of the fundamental relationship between our varied spiritual capacities and the diversity within the Dharma, in terms of teachings, practices, pedagogical methods, and so forth, leads him to be very skeptical of Hōnen's claims of "easy" access to birth in the Pure Land. Accordingly, he writes:

> To rely only on [Amida's] power without considering one's own state in life is beyond stupidity. It is difficult to purify one's karma by merely reciting the syllables of the nenbutsu and it is a mistake to hope for birth in the Pure Land in this way; how could one depend on [the nenbutsu] alone if one is lacking in virtuous behavior and wisdom?[20]

In the *Shin'yō shō* 心要鈔 (Essentials of the Mind [Intent upon Seeking Enlightenment], ca. 1196)[21] he writes:

[17] ND 64: 1–15.
[18] ND 64: 11b4–6.
[19] Kamata and Tanaka 1971, p. 313a.
[20] Ibid., p. 314a.
[21] ND 63: 327–56.

> Because men and women, clerics and laity of the present age, both in the capital and in the countryside, have accumulated some good karma, they encounter the Dharma. From their youth, they follow in accordance with circumstances. But not being of sharp faculties, they are no match for doubt and delusion. And because they lack true wisdom, they are not able to attain enlightenment. They merely believe and act in accordance with custom. . . . Ensnared by our karmic past and barely able to establish the practice of beginners, we follow the past in most things. . . . Is it not doubtful that people like this, at the end of their life, can of themselves call the Buddha's name ten times, escape the three realms and achieve birth in the Pure Land? I cannot speak for others, but for myself, I find this difficult to believe.[22]

Thus, Jōkei's hierarchical view of human nature and his skepticism that there is some quick ticket to salvation lead him to emphasize a third theme—the fundamental importance of moral diligence. He was, I think, genuinely fearful of the antinomian consequences of Hōnen's teachings. Here is another passage from his critique of Hōnen:

> It is of utmost importance that people be taught the importance of upholding the precepts as a karmic cause for birth in the Pure Land. If not and the precepts are not maintained, it will be difficult to control the six senses and, once these doors are opened, the three poisons (of desire, anger, and ignorance) arise easily. If one is afflicted by deluded thinking, then the window for contemplating the Buddha (nenbutsu) remains opaque; and when the mind is disturbed by greed and anger, it is difficult for the waters of the jeweled lake to be clear.[23]

From these passages, one gets some sense of Jōkei's concerns with the exclusivistic direction toward which Hōnen's message inevitably leads. His fears were in many ways borne out in the teachings of Hōnen's most famous disciple Shinran who asserted an even more radical and exclusive emphasis on faith in Amida's vow.

Jōkei argued that this exclusive and universal message undermined the

[22] ND 63: 353b12–354a10.
[23] Kamata and Tanaka 1971, p. 315a.

entire tradition of Buddhism, which is in so many respects a cumulative tradition that, like an onion, keeps growing new layers. For him, this cumulative tradition was the distinctive feature of Mahayana Buddhism. Lose this and you might as well start a new religion around a selective collection of one Buddha, several texts, and one recitation practice. In summary, Jōkei's embrace of what I am labeling "Buddhist pluralism" is based on his view of human nature and the consequent necessity of multiple teachings, practices, and even objects of devotion according to an individual's spiritual capacity.

Jōkei and Kannon—A Convenient Partnership

Jōkei's defense of Buddhist pluralism in the face of Hōnen's exclusive teachings provides the context, I want to argue, for comprehending the former's evolving devotion to and propagation of Kannon. Jōkei authored a number of texts that praise and promote the merit of devotion to Kannon including four *kōshiki*, a proclamation text known as the *Busshari Kannon daishi hotsuganmon* 仏舎利観音大士発願文 (A Vow to the Buddha's Relics and the Great Sage Kannon, 1208–1213),[24] and several other texts that specifically praise Kannon's power and compassion including the *Kanjin i shōjō enmyō no koto* 観心為清浄円明事 (Contemplation on the Pure and Perfect Enlightenment, 1213).[25] Scholars have noted and pondered the apparent shift in Jōkei's devotion toward Kannon over the latter years of his life. As noted above, many tend to point to his move from Kasagidera to Kaijūsenji in 1209, where Jūichimen Kannon was the main image.[26] But one could also note his move to Kannon'in at Kasagi in 1202. All of the texts above were written between 1201 and 1213 when he died. Thus, it appears that Jōkei promoted Kannon more frequently, though not exclusively, from about 1201 onward.[27] Even his death was described in a way that suggested his devotion to Kannon.

According to the *Gedatsu shōnin okeijōki* 解脱上人御形状記 (Chronicles of the Honorable Gedatsu Shōnin), Jōkei performed a ritual for the final moment of death (*rinjū* 臨終) and on the third day of the second month (two days later), died seated in the lotus posture (*tanza* 端座) facing the southwest.[28] This direc-

[24] ND 64: 32–34.

[25] ND 64: 22–23.

[26] See, for example, Hiraoka 1958–60, vol. 3, pp. 598–99, 645; Tomimura 1970, pp. 22–23; Yasui 1981, pp. 36–37; and Kusunoki 1985, p. 33ff.

[27] For a more detailed analysis of Jōkei's shifting devotion, see Ford 2006, pp. 149–153.

[28] Kamata and Tanaka 1971, p. 316.

tional reference intimates his aspiration for birth in Kannon's realm, which as we have noted lies in the seas south of India and southwest of Japan. Regardless of whether this hagiographical account is accurate or not, it signals the perception of Jōkei's devotional aspirations. What might have motivated Jōkei to promote devotion to Kannon—and perhaps even to aspire personally for birth in Kannon's realm after this life—over the many other alternatives? Perhaps an answer lies in the ideological clash with the *senju nenbutsu* teaching that must have been spreading after Hōnen wrote the *Senchakushū* in 1198.

In his Kannon-centered texts written during the last twelve years of his life, Jōkei often highlights three meritorious benefits one might realize through devotion to Kannon. First, Kannon, being the bodhisattva of compassion, is genuinely inclined to alleviate the suffering of all beings regardless of their station in life. Second, Kannon can manifest himself in numerous forms according to the capacity of the devotee. And third, Kannon's sacred realm lies within the Sahā-world and is thus, by definition, easier to realize than Amida's Pure Land.

In several instances, Jōkei argues that achieving birth on Mt. Potalaka is easier than achieving birth in Amida's Western Paradise. For example, one of the three versions of the *Kannon kōshiki* 観音講式[29] that he penned in 1201 reads:

> If there is someone whose practice and karma are not yet mature and has hindrances to birth in the Pure Land, he can first reside on Mt. Potalaka. That mountain is in the great sea southwest from here. . . . Even though it is different in size, it [Potalaka] is like facing the Pure Land. Thus, it is part of the Sahā-world but it is not like the Sahā-world. Among the wise men and sages, who would not aspire to it? It is a pure land but not a pure land. Birth there is truly easy for the unenlightened.[30]

Alluding to the traditionally understood relationship between the bodhisattva path and one's potential to either contemplatively perceive or actually achieve birth in the realms of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas, Jōkei argues for the easier destination. Mt. Potalaka serves as a stepping stone, as it were, to birth in Amida's Pure Land. Here, as another example, is a rather lengthy

[29] T 84: 886a–887c. The text is also reproduced in Kōshiki Kenkyūkai 1993 (pp. 199–205); Yamada and Shimizu 2000 (pp. 161–76) and on the internet (KDB no. 65).

[30] T 84: 887a10–23.

excerpt from the same text.

> Although the merciful and compassionate vows made by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are said to be equal, it is a fact that the virtue of some is more excellent than others. Here there is nothing in which the great being Kannon is deficient, whether in this world or the next, whether for those who have renounced secular life or those still leading a secular life. No petition will go unfulfilled. What is the reason for this? The Six Kannon and the Eight Great Kannon manifest [various] forms and virtues. Their types are not singular. We have yet to hear of another like this among the rest of the great saints. Also within this one-of-many, of the many virtues, [he] is endowed with every one. With respect to the Senju Kannon (thousand-armed), each of those arms bestows a different merit. And regarding the Jūichimen Kannon (eleven-faced), each of those faces [responds to] a different type of [spiritual] capacity. If one were to seek out the totality, he would make one body and overlay it with all the different objects of devotion. [Kannon vowed], "Of the *dhāraṇī* offered by bodhisattvas as well as wise and holy men, mine is preeminent and none is superior." Within the Buddhist Dharma, it is not beyond [the power of] these mysterious *dhāraṇī* to yield speedy benefit even if the merit is meager. And of all such *dhāraṇī,* Kannon's is preeminent. Furthermore, great compassion comes first among the myriad practices of a bodhisattva, and Kannon embodies the great compassion of all Buddhas. You should therefore have faith that this is the source of [Kannon's] majestic power to benefit [sentient beings]. For this reason, from the Emperor, the Lord of Ten Good Acts, to the four-fold Buddhist community [of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen], from those who dwell within pearled curtains to those who dwell in rustic homes of scrubwood, of those who enshrine him as their object of devotion or recite the sacred texts, Kannon will surely respond eighty to ninety percent of the time. [Kannon's soteric efforts are directed] especially toward poor families, those who associate with the mean and lowly, those who single-handedly care for an elderly parent, or those who hold a tender, crying child at their breast. . . . For those who endure such poverty, loneliness, grief,

> or suffering, or those who, when life overwhelms them, harbor deep resentment in their hearts, they should respectfully look to Kannon's mercy and rely upon his great compassionate vow. When they do this, Kannon, with his clairaudience, will hear their voices and, with his eye of awakening, see into their hearts. [He] will offer compassion that replaces a mother's compassion and love that surpasses even a father's love. Our karmic retribution is inevitable and although immediate assistance is difficult, [Kannon's promise] to each and every person, according to our capacity, is not empty.[31]

The colophon goes on to say:

> Although these words are ordinary, their intent is not meager. In many cases people employ a variety of *honzon* (objects of devotion) in this world, in order to lodge petitions [with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas] for the present or future incarnations. With respect to Kannon we have petitions concerning [at least] two incarnations—for here [in this life], and for there [in future incarnations]—which we can combine. Even if [we] cut off hopes for fame and wealth, the sutras tell us that we should venerate [Kannon's Original Vow] in particular for [other, less selfish] benefits. Are not the number of people who aspire and seek [rebirth] on Mt. Potalaka exceedingly few [compared to those who see rebirth in Amida's Pure Land]? [Rebirth on Mt. Potalaka] converges especially close to Sukhāvatī as a means of salvation.[32]

In these extended excerpts, we have a succinct proclamation for the merit of and rationale for devotion to Kannon. First, Kannon is the preeminent figure of compassion within the Buddhist pantheon—indeed, Kannon "embodies the great compassion of all Buddhas." Second, Kannon is pluralistically manifest in both form and virtues, enabling him to bestow merit according to need and capacity. Third, Kannon left a *dhāraṇī* second to none in its power to "yield speedy benefit even if the merit is meager." Fourth, Kannon is universally responsive regardless of one's station in life or difficult circumstances. And finally, veneration to Kannon yields the pragmatic efficiency of two benefits—those of this world and a desirous rebirth in one's next life. Indeed, Jōkei seems

[31] T 84: 886b29–c16.
[32] T 84: 887b17–23.

to lament the fact that aspiration for birth in Kannon's realm is so rare. As we saw in the passages above, Jōkei asserts that Potalaka is easier to realize than Amida's realm.

All of this—the trends in Jōkei's propagation of Kannon and the message conveyed—provoked me to reflect on Jōkei's motivations in the context of his ideological skirmish with Hōnen and the emerging Pure Land movement. The *Kōfukuji sōjō* presents his rational critique of Hōnen's teachings. But his promotion of Kannon represents a different discursive manner of defending, what was for Jōkei, the normative Buddhist tradition. Faced with the "exclusivism" of Hōnen's message, if, like Jōkei, you wanted to defend the pluralistic or inclusive character of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, which of the most popular divinities would you select to signify your message? You might choose Śākyamuni just to ground your defense in the historical origin of the tradition, and Jōkei does this often to be sure. But what figure better represents the plurality of Buddhism than Kannon, the bodhisattva of multiple, indeed infinite, incarnations?

As Jōkei himself argues, Kannon is the personification of compassion and *upāya* (Jpn. *hōben* 方便), the Mahayana doctrine that legitimizes pluralism with respect to teachings, practices, methods of persuasion, and even objects of devotion. Kannon's multiplicity—in terms of form, virtues, capacity to respond, and soteriological benefits—makes him the deity of choice given the varying capacity of suffering beings. Jōkei also appears to increasingly emphasize the benefit of birth in Kannon's realm. The 1209 version of the *Kannon kōshiki*, the last one datable and authored by Jōkei just four years prior to his death, is single-mindedly focused on the goal of birth in Kannon's realm, as reflected in the alternative title for this text, *Chigū Kannon kōshiki* 値遇観音講式 (Meeting Kannon Ceremonial).[33] The section titles for this text are: Clarifying (1) the name (of Kannon), (2) the direction (of his realm), (3) the forms and features (of his realm), (4) the forest and ponds, (5) the palace, (6) the karmic causes (for birth in Kannon's realm), and (7) the dedications (of merit of Kannon). Jōkei's attraction to Kannon can also be seen in his stress on the merits of aspiring for Mt. Potalaka over against seeking Kannon's intervention in this world. An added benefit, which Jōkei never fails to mention, is Kannon's close relationship with the Pure Land by virtue of being the most popular of Amida's attendants and, according to one text, the future inheritor of the Pure Land.

[33] See KDB no. 70. The original resides in the archives of Kōfukuji. For an overview of the text, see Nishiyama 1988, p. 92.

So highlighting Kannon and promoting aspiration to birth in Kannon's realm enable Jōkei to borrow from the popular capital of Amida, while undercutting Hōnen's exclusivistic message.

At this point, one might logically ask how effective Jōkei's strategy was in impeding the spread of Hōnen's exclusivist teachings. A full analysis of this question goes beyond the parameters of this essay and it is probably impossible to assess the impact of Jōkei's message in isolation anyway. Elsewhere I have noted that Hōnen, whether intentionally or not, introduced a "rhetoric of exclusivity" into medieval Buddhist discourse that clearly opened the door for Shinran and Nichiren to follow.[34] So at the level of discourse and sectarian identity, Jōkei's efforts clearly did not alter the trajectory or growing popularity of Hōnen's message. At the level of practice, however, the question is decidedly more complex. I would contend that the practice of religion in general and Buddhism in particular in contemporary Japan bear far more correspondence with Jōkei's vision than the exclusivity of Hōnen, Shinran, or Nichiren. This is not to argue, of course, that Jōkei was an influential factor, but rather that traditional Buddhist pluralism seems ultimately to have won out on Japanese soil.[35]

Conclusion

From a broader interpretive perspective, Jōkei's gravitation toward and appropriation of Kannon exemplifies the ongoing dialectical process of "meaning making" within changing ideological and rhetorical contexts. Inherited concepts and symbols become the tools for "reimagining" new world views or, in this case, defending old ones. Praxis, from this perspective, is part of an ongoing dialectical discourse in which apposite symbols are chosen from an existing tool box to serve specific ideological ends. Many scholars, as I have noted, interpret Jōkei's increasing allegiance to Kannon in the latter years of his life in terms of his subjective beliefs and devotion. In contrast, I am arguing for a more contextualized understanding of Jōkei's shifting devotional rhetoric and praxis. The historical context, particularly the growing popularity of Hōnen's

[34] See Ford 2002.

[35] Observing this pluralistic dimension within the sacred sites of contemporary Japanese religion, Reader and Tanabe write: "Temples and shrines recognize the importance of plurality and hence of reinforcing the power of prayers for practical benefits by utilizing more than one deity or shrine, especially in times of great need." Reader and Tanabe 1998, p. 189.

message and the socio-religious transformations taking place suggests a different motive for Jōkei's proselytizing efforts. Though this more ideological interpretation is admittedly speculative, there is, I think, sufficient evidence for its plausibility. Specifically, the timing of Jōkei's apparent gravitation toward Kannon and the consonance between his critique of Hōnen's exclusivism and Kannon as a symbol of plurality suggest something beyond Jōkei's subjective experience. Kannon became a strategic choice in the context of an ideological battle for the heart of Buddhism itself. In this instance, Kannon was the perfect foil and partner in Jōkei's efforts to stem the rising tide of Pure Land exclusivism. Together, these two, Kannon and Jōkei, became the leading defenders of "Buddhist pluralism" in early medieval Japan.

ABBREVIATIONS

KDB Kōshiki detabesu 講式データベース . http://www.f.waseda.jp/guelberg/koshiki/datenb-j.htm.

ND *Nihon daizōkyō* 日本大蔵経 . Revised and enlarged edition. 100 vols., ed. Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan 鈴木学術財団 . Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1973–78.

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大蔵経 . 85 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.

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